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Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)
later: Mr. Ball (Vice-Chairman) ..... (New Zealand)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 103: Advancement of women
(A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/167, 203, 318, 354, 363, 376, 409 and 477)

Agenda item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women
(A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95–S/1998/311 and A/53/308)

1. **Ms. King** (Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that in the course of the year the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming had received significant attention in many intergovernmental and governmental bodies and in civil society. A significant step forward had been made specifically in defending the rights of women: the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, held in Rome in June and July 1998, had decided that perpetrators of gender-related crimes should be held accountable, and the International Tribunal for Rwanda had convicted the former mayor of the Rwandan town of Taba not only of genocide but also of the accompanying rapes, thus reversing the impunity that sexual crimes in war had theretofore enjoyed. The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to be held in the year 2000 to assess the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action should also do much to advance the cause of women.

2. The reports before the Committee indicated that throughout 1998, Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society had acted resolutely to promote the cause of women and had taken bold measures to realize the goals in the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. The number of national bodies for the advancement of women had increased and in many instances so had their influence in national policy-making. Consequently, there was a growing recognition of the role of women in the productive economy, the idea that poverty could not be successfully eradicated without improving the situation of women was gaining ground and considerable progress was being made towards gender equality in education and health.

3. However, there was a long way to go to meet the challenges of the Platform for Action, especially in the light of the global financial crisis that was gripping many countries. Experience had shown repeatedly that women were the first affected in times of crisis, as confirmed by a number of facts and figures. For instance, while women's share in the formal economy was growing, their conditions of employment were worsening and they were the first to lose their jobs in the changing labour market.

4. In the face of such serious difficulties, there had to be a clear recognition that all policies, whether in the area of finance, economics or trade, had a different social impact on women and men and that the difference must be reckoned with. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, soon to be observed, and the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should provide an opportunity to examine those themes. Universal ratification by the year 2000 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the timely submission of reports by all States Parties was also a goal to be pursued.

5. As Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, she met periodically with heads of departments and offices of the United Nations Secretariat, including the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, to discuss the progress made in gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes and in improving the status of women in the Secretariat, as well as to consider various individual cases. Also, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, she met with the heads of the specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system to consider the practices to be followed in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and integrating a gender perspective in their work, and to discuss the situation of women in the agencies and the development of joint activities and cooperative arrangements in order to increase the mobility of women within the United Nations system.

6. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that UNIFEM was committed to achieving women's empowerment and gender equality by focusing on three thematic areas: strengthening women's economic capacity; engendering gender-sensitive governance and leadership; and promoting women's human rights and eliminating gender-based violence. In its work, it continued to follow five core strategies, namely, building the capacity and leadership of women's organizations and networks; leveraging political and financial support for women from a range of development agents; forging new synergies and effective partnerships among women's organizations, Governments, the United Nations system and the private sector; undertaking pilot and demonstration projects to test

innovative approaches to women's empowerment and building an operational knowledge base to influence gender mainstreaming.

7. The reform agenda had benefited the work of UNIFEM by creating new opportunities to strengthen inter-agency collaboration, attracting new funding and increasing the political will of Member States. Gender-thematic groups had been formed in many country offices. UNIFEM had also benefited from the widespread interest in the eradication of feminized violence and it had developed innovative strategies in that area.

8. In keeping with its mandate, UNIFEM had acted as a catalyst and an innovator. For example, in launching its inter-agency regional awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women, it had sought and obtained the cooperation of nine United Nations funds and programmes and official support from 19 Latin American and Caribbean Governments, an approach that had given greater resonance to its campaigns. It had, furthermore, taken the lead in initiating an inter-agency global video campaign and organizing a conference on a world free of violence against women, which would be held on 24 November 1998. The conference would review past experience in combating violence against women and would highlight the possibility of eradicating different kinds of gender-based violence. By focusing on the success of some of those strategies, UNIFEM hoped to work in closer partnership with the United Nations, Governments and civil society in combating gender violence.

9. Along the same lines, UNIFEM had worked in West Africa to help women who produced shea butter to modernize their production and marketing strategy and take advantage of the new possibilities inherent in globalization and trade liberalization. UNIFEM had also organized trade fairs to help women who managed small enterprises.

10. **Ms. Khan** (Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women), said that as at 30 August 1998, 162 States had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or had succeeded other States parties, making it second only to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the most widely accepted international convention. However, in 1998 there had been only one new ratification or accession, which was a matter of concern, given that the Beijing Platform for Action recommended that the Convention should be universally ratified by the year 2000. The Committee had therefore redoubled its efforts, and had called upon the United Nations system as a whole and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in particular to give greater priority to encouraging States to ratify the Convention.

11. At their 8th and 9th meetings, the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies had expressed concern over the increasing backlog of overdue reports. As at 30 August 1998, 203 reports, of which 60 were initial reports, had not been submitted to the Committee. The Committee had therefore decided on an exceptional basis, and as a temporary measure, to invite States parties to the Convention to combine a maximum of two reports required under article 18 of the Convention.

12. In its resolution 51/68, the General Assembly had reiterated the call made by the Fourth World Conference on Women for States parties to limit the extent of any reservations they lodged to the Convention and to ensure that no reservation was incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention or otherwise incompatible with international treaty law. The Committee was particularly concerned by the number and extent of reservations to articles 2 and 16, which it considered fundamental to the Convention. To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Committee had, at its nineteenth session in June 1998, prepared a statement concerning the adverse impact of reservations to the Convention on endeavours to achieve equality between the sexes.

13. Since July 1997, the Committee had held two annual sessions and made significant progress in its work. In addition to reviewing the reports of 32 States parties and formulating concluding comments on those reports, it had focused on a number of issues, in particular reservations and the growing feminization of migrant labour and the risks faced by female migrant workers.

14. The Committee welcomed the fact that the majority of States parties whose reports had been considered had taken positive measures to ensure the *de jure* equality of men and women. However, in all reporting States it was clear that de facto equality was far from realized. The Committee therefore considered that temporary affirmative action measures must be taken as a matter of urgency in order to give concrete expression to such *de jure* equality.

15. At the request of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies, the Division for the Advancement of Women had prepared an analysis of the manner in which the various treaty bodies integrated the gender perspective into their work. That study would be helpful in identifying strategies for gender mainstreaming in all human rights activities.

16. At its nineteenth session, as part of the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Committee, on behalf of the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on its own behalf, had prepared a joint statement on the indivisibility of civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights and the fundamental importance of gender awareness to women's rights.

17. Significant progress had been made towards the preparation of an optional protocol to the Convention. The open-ended working group established for that purpose should complete its work by the forty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 1999.

18. In recent years, the Committee had deepened its relationship with the specialized agencies, funds, programmes and bodies of the United Nations and with non-governmental organizations. The specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations were now being invited to submit to the pre-session working group information on those States parties whose reports were currently before it. In order to promote women's rights in a spirit of consensus, the Committee was working in increasingly close cooperation with non-governmental organizations and civil society, and publicized its work on the Internet. The Committee had also deepened its relationship with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the treaty bodies and the special rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights.

19. **Mr. Suamin** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the issue of equality should not be made subordinate to economic considerations, and that the international community must continue to work to ensure that women could enjoy all their basic rights, regardless of current economic difficulties. Innovative measures must be adopted to combat the worrying increase in the feminization of poverty; the usefulness of microcredit had been recognized, and it should be more widely employed. The only way to demarginalize women was to educate and train them and increase their awareness of their rights. They must join the mainstream of development and be involved in the political, social and economic decision-making process.

20. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provided a legal framework not only for ensuring women full equality with men, but also for protecting their inherent rights. While one hundred and sixty-two States had ratified, acceded or succeeded to the Convention, all States must sign the Convention if it were to become a global instrument by the year 2000. The Group of 77 and China congratulated the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for the excellent work it had done, and urged that it should be allocated more resources to ensure that the number of meetings required by its enormous workload could be held.

21. The Group of 77 and China called on all Member States to condemn violence against women, to pledge to undertake effective measures at the national level, including the implementation of appropriate legal measures, in order to confront all aspects of the problem, and to focus on education as a means of changing attitudes. He stressed the need to develop comprehensive legal frameworks in order to protect female migrant workers and women and children who were the victims of sexual exploitation. There was also a need to provide assistance to women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations, and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. The Group endorsed the outcome in that field of the forty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

22. The Economic and Social Council meetings on the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits had been helpful in addressing the issue of gender mainstreaming. It would be of additional benefit to move forward on system-wide coordination in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

23. At the regional level, the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean had been held in Santiago, Chile, in November 1977. A conference on African women and economic development had been convened under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa. It should be stressed that national plans of action were central in the review and appraisal of follow-up activities to the Beijing Conference.

24. The Group of 77 and China joined other countries in calling for a high-level plenary review to evaluate the progress made in implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, to be held as a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000.

25. As the United Nations continued to work to bridge the gap between *de jure* and de facto equality, it must itself set an example. He therefore welcomed the activities of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and looked forward to the completion of its analysis of the situation of women in the Secretariat. The Group of 77 and China noted with satisfaction that the proportion of women at senior levels had increased from 16 to 22 per cent, but nevertheless

considered that additional efforts were needed in order to achieve the targets set with respect to the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution.

26. **Mr. Sucharipa** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and, in addition, Iceland, said that statistics revealed glaring inequalities in the status of women, inasmuch as women constituted two thirds of the world's illiterate adults and the vast majority of its poor people, 90 per cent of the positions of responsibility in political parties and national parliaments worldwide were held by men, and women worked approximately twice the unpaid time that men did. Full implementation of the commitments contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which constituted the bedrock for national, regional and international action targeting the advancement of women, would require gender mainstreaming, complemented by carefully targeted, women-specific activities to redress existing inequalities. In particular, it was essential to collect data broken down by sex and age, with the inclusion of gender indicators. The States members of the European Union were resolved to honour their commitments and to meet the objectives laid out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and would shape their domestic policies accordingly, working to that end in partnership with non-governmental organizations, whose assistance was indispensable. The elaboration of policies that addressed the causes, rather than only the consequences, of women's persisting inequality had to include a thorough analysis of adverse gender stereotypes. The media had an important role to play in that connection.

27. Achieving gender equality would necessitate changes in institutional practices and social relations. Political commitment and accountability were also essential. Furthermore, programmes for the advancement of women had to be adequately funded. Lastly, adequate training was needed to promote gender expertise.

28. With respect to action within the United Nations system, the European Union countries applauded the work of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. They attached great importance to the right of women to decide freely on matters related to their sexual and reproductive health, and hoped that the Commission on the Status of Women, at its 1999 session, would generate ideas and proposals that would form a solid basis for the overall review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action by the General Assembly during its special session in the year 2000. That session should be preceded by regional preparatory meetings.

29. Although there were 162 States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the countries of the European Union called on all States that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention, so that it would achieve universality by the year 2000. Moreover, they were concerned about the fact that many States had expressed reservations that were incompatible with the objectives of the Convention. Those reservations should be withdrawn, or at any rate reviewed with a view to their early withdrawal. States that saw fit to formulate reservations should do so as precisely and narrowly as possible and in accordance with international treaty law.

30. The countries of the European Union welcomed the progress made by the Open-ended Working Group on the Elaboration of a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and called on the Working Group to complete its work in the course of 1999, as that year would mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption and opening for signature of the Convention.

31. The European Union had launched a number of concrete programmes and initiatives to review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In addition, it was devoting increased attention to the issue of equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market, as could be seen from the Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies. It was concerned to integrate into its activities both a mainstreaming approach and specific targeted actions for women. Countries wishing to join the European Union were encouraged to participate in relevant programmes as soon as they applied for membership.

32. The European Union welcomed the stipulation of rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other form of sexual violence as crimes against humanity and war crimes under articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It was of the highest importance to elect a number of female judges for that Court.

33. The European Union took note with satisfaction of the first verdict of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. For the first time, an international court had punished sexual violence in a civil war, and rape had been found to be an act of genocide. Great credit was due to the women's non-governmental organizations whose persistence and dedication had helped to bring about that result.

34. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that wider use should be made of microcredit, as it helped to empower women and was an effective means of combating the feminization of poverty, which had increased as a result of economic globalization, especially in the least developed countries.

35. His delegation believed that the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 1997 (resolution 1997/17) and the Council's 1998 resolution on the integration of gender mainstreaming in all programmes and policies of United Nations organizations were the most comprehensive decisions to date on the issue. It would like to see gender issues integrated into all future triennial comprehensive policy reviews on operational activities. In addition, the Commission on the Status of Women should address the issue of indicators for gender mainstreaming at the national level at its 1999 session.

36. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the General Assembly in 1993, and the Beijing Platform for Action had identified violence against women as a violation of their fundamental rights. To combat the problem, strong laws and equally strong enforcement were needed, together with international cooperation and assistance to prevent the commission of acts of violence and the political will to initiate the necessary social changes.

37. To prevent traffic in women and girls, action at the national, regional and global levels was called for. At the Summit Meeting of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation, the Heads of State and Government had decided that a convention on the prevention and elimination of trafficking in women and children for the purposes of prostitution would enter into force by mid-1999. The United Nations had a critical role to play in that connection by supporting the capacity-building of national and regional preventive mechanisms and assisting them to lay down strategies for combating such trafficking. Recognizing with appreciation the role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), his delegation called for increased resources for the Fund to enable it to continue its work.

38. It would not be possible to eliminate traditional and customary practices affecting the health of women and girls without a fundamental change in societal attitudes; such change could only be effected by empowering women through education, an awareness-raising campaign and grass-roots activity to eliminate practices such as female genital mutilation.

39. National action plans prepared by Member States played a central role in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; the role of civil society in complementing the action of the national authorities could not be over-emphasized.

40. In preparing for the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 to review the outcome of the Beijing Conference, it was necessary to realize that it was vital to have increased resources and international support in order to advance in the follow-up of the Conference.

41. **Mr. Rubadiri** (Malawi), speaking on agenda item 103, on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, and referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/53/376), said that the pattern of under-representation of women persisted in all categories in the United Nations system.

42. Although his delegation was encouraged that, in March 1998, the Administrative Committee on Coordination had adopted a statement on gender equality and mainstreaming in the work of the United Nations system (ACC/1998/4), the Secretary-General himself had projected that, given the current pace of change and if all factors remained unchanged, gender equality would not be reached in the Secretariat before the year 2006, in the Director category, or before 2007, in the Professional category. Member States should assist the Secretary-General in his task by identifying and submitting more female candidates.

43. The Community had noted with regret that there were practically no African women represented, particularly from southern Africa, and it urged the Secretary-General to ensure equitable representation of women by region.

44. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women (A/53/354), although such practices remained widespread, the Southern African Development Community was pleased to see that there was growing opinion that they constituted a form of violence against women and a violation of their human rights, and it welcomed the joint statement by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA in April 1997 on female genital mutilation. It also welcomed the decision taken by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to include in its concluding remarks, when it appeared that such harmful practices existed in a State, specific recommendations for eliminating them.

45. Although most countries of the Community had proclaimed equality of the sexes in their Constitutions and had acceded to or ratified the Convention on the Elimination

of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, those rights had not become a reality in everyday life. Women were often under-represented in decision-making positions and were prevented from having a significant impact on many key institutions and policies. In most cases they remained marginalized and uninformed, particularly about their rights in land matters, business transactions and reproductive rights.

46. Some 90 per cent of the economically active women were employed in the informal sector of agriculture; their representation in the formal sector was very low, although gender disparities in formal employment had decreased from 56 per cent to 22 per cent. Member States were bound by the SADC declaration on gender and development to enforce the principle of equal pay.

47. In the education sector, the Community was also trying to reduce illiteracy among women and to raise the quality of employment and remuneration available to them by focusing on education for girls. Women's equal participation was constrained by the multiple roles they played in society; as a result, they tended to engage in low profit enterprises compared to their male counterparts.

48. Violence of various kinds against women was on the increase in the countries of the Community and in some countries, women's and children's health was suffering because of deteriorating health services, malnutrition and the impact of structural adjustment policies.

49. The Southern African Development Community was convinced that improvement of the status of women and children depended on sustainable development; the latter could only be attained if women and men worked together as partners.

50. **Ms. Yuan Xiaoying** (People's Republic of China) said that although many countries had sought, in the past three years, to act on the decisions taken at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the goals set at the Conference were far from having been achieved and much still remained to be done to improve the status of women.

51. Her delegation welcomed the efforts made by the Secretary-General to alleviate the poverty of women and it hoped that the developed countries and the international community as a whole would cooperate in that endeavour.

52. Fifty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, although the international community now recognized that women's rights were inseparable from human rights in general, there was still widespread discrimination against women, inequality between men and women and violations of women's rights. Her delegation had always made gender equality a basic State policy in the development of Chinese society.

53. In China, women were involved in the management of all aspects of national and social affairs and made a tremendous contribution to the improvement of democracy and the legal system. Women accounted for 22 per cent of the members of the Ninth National People's Congress; they had proposed legislation and policies to promote education and health and to protect the environment, and had sponsored a law on the protection of the rights and interests of women.

54. The national programme for the development of the women of China covering the period 1995–2000, which had been adopted in July 1995 as part of the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, laid down the goals to be attained by the year 2000 in the field of the participation of women in the political process, employment, health, family and the eradication of poverty.

55. Since ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, China had endeavoured to improve legislation safeguarding the rights and interests of women and had submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women its third and fourth combined periodic reports, including addenda, on the implementation of the Convention.

56. **Mrs. Wremer** (Norway) said that, 50 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the opportunities for men and women were still not equal. It was important to improve the quality of life of women throughout the world by ensuring respect for their fundamental rights.

57. In that connection, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women — the only instrument which dealt exclusively with women's rights and gender equality and to which 162 States had acceded — should be fully implemented.

58. It was also important that the Open-ended Working Group of the Commission on the Status of Women should finalize the draft optional protocol to the Convention.

59. The growing feminization of poverty in many regions of the world was proof that globalization did not benefit everyone. Trafficking in women, which was increasing, in Norway as elsewhere, must be fought at the national and international levels.

60. Violence against women took many forms which the Special Rapporteur on violence against women had requested Governments to include in their national reports. Only strong measures, including legislation, research,

training and support services for victims, in which men participated, could combat violence.

61. In March 1999, the Norwegian Gender Equality Act would have been in effect for 20 years. Its goal was to ensure genuine equality and to influence attitudes towards the roles of men and women. For instance, the Act stipulated that the principle of gender equality must form the basis of teaching methods, representation on public committees and boards, and employment, although statistics showed that there was still more to be done.

62. Other democratic institutions, such as the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Centre for Gender Equality, whose work should supplement that of non-governmental organizations and research institutions, were part of the machinery established by Norway to achieve gender equality.

63. Norway was increasingly aware of the disparities which existed among women themselves; such disparities required the adoption of special measures adapted to new situations, in cooperation with the United Nations.

64. *Mr. Ball (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

65. **Mr. Nishitateno** (Japan) said that, more than any other event, the Fourth World Conference on Women had helped to promote and protect the fundamental rights of women.

66. Japan had adhered to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action since its adoption in 1995, and the following year it had formulated its own national plan of action, which was aimed at achieving gender equality by the year 2000 and was accompanied by practical steps taken at the level of local public organizations.

67. The participation of women in the decision-making process was crucial for their empowerment. Japan had therefore been working to appoint women to advisory councils with the aim of achieving the international goal of 30 per cent female membership. In that connection, it welcomed the efforts made by the Secretary-General to achieve gender equality in the United Nations system by the year 2000.

68. Since women enjoyed a longer life expectancy than men, Japan was working to create an environment adapted to older persons which would take account of gender equality. It continued its strong support of the Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women administered by UNIFEM. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, it had extended its partnership with the developing countries and other donors in the three priority areas designated in the Initiative on Women in Development: education, health, and economic and social activities.

69. **Mr. Albin** (Mexico), referring to the progress achieved in the participation of women in the political life of his country, noted that there were 19 women senators and 87 women deputies in Congress, two women Ministers and 93 women judges.

70. The decision taken in August 1998 to decentralize the National Commission on Women should enable the Commission to ensure the continuity of the national women's programme, which it was responsible for implementing, beyond the year 2000. The efforts made under that programme by governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations for the advancement of women, legislators and specialized research and teaching institutions, at both the national and the State level, had resulted in progress in some areas: a system of indicators concerning the status of women had been developed which would facilitate the breakdown by gender of the data relating to different sectors; in 1998, on the occasion of International Women's Day, a health card had been introduced, issued only to women; a cooperation agreement had been concluded with the International Labour Organization, *inter alia* to improve the working conditions of women wage earners engaged in the assembly of products for export; a technical cooperation network had been set up between rural women's aid agencies in order to assess the status of rural women and take measures to improve their situation; a training fellowship programme for unemployed women had been launched to promote the establishment of women's businesses; a process had been initiated to bring federal and local legislation into line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the federal civil and criminal legislation on domestic and sexual violence had been amended, local legislation in that area was about to be revised, and marital rape had been recognized as a crime.

71. At the international level, his Government had submitted its combined third and fourth reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was currently analysing the observations and recommendations which had been made on the subject, having also communicated them to the non-governmental organizations concerned. It was gratifying that preparations were being made for a special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action in June 2000. His delegation was ready to take part in those preparations and to help work out

the requisite permanent indicators for assessing the implementation of the Platform.

72. His Government was convinced that the cause of women was also that of men and that by cooperating human beings could defend a common course in the next century.

73. **Ms. Lukas** (Holy See) said that, by joining the consensus which had adopted the Beijing Platform for Action, the Holy See, despite its reservations to certain parts of the document, had signalled its approval for "the living heart of the Platform". In particular, its provisions on the needs of women in poverty, ending violence against women, the access of women to employment, land, capital and technology and the advancement of women through increased literacy and education corresponded closely with the social teaching of the Catholic Church.

74. Those questions had always been of concern to the Church. The *Human Development Report, 1997*, which had focused on poverty, had found that, besides children and older persons, the poor were more likely to be women, who earned less than men although they worked longer hours.

75. Illiteracy affected women in particular: 538 million women worldwide were still illiterate, and school enrolment for girls, even at the primary level, was lower than that for boys, while the drop-out rate was higher.

76. Although women's access to health care had greatly improved, the number of deaths from pregnancy and delivery was still increasing. More than half of the pregnant women in developing countries had anaemia, and personnel trained in obstetrics were sadly lacking. AIDS had killed 1 million women in 1997, and the number of orphans under the age of 15 had increased to 8 million.

77. To combat the injustices afflicting women, the Church had committed itself to improving women's status. On the eve of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Pope John Paul II had called on all Catholic care and educational institutions to reach out to women and girls, especially those who were poor and on the fringes of society. He had asked all educational services to emphasize equal access to education, to instil in boys a sense of women's dignity and worth, to provide additional possibilities for disadvantaged girls and to remedy the problems which caused girls to drop out. He had requested universities and colleges to show special sensitivity to the concerns of young women in the preparation of future leaders of society. He had appealed to medical institutions, especially those concerned with primary health care, to give special attention to girls, and he had urged Catholic women's organizations to provide guidance for girls and young women.

78. Now that the United Nations and the whole world community were beginning to reassess the progress made since the Beijing Conference, the Church, fully aware of the importance of the undertaking, urged society as a whole, and political authorities in particular, to advance the status of women. It expressed its solidarity with all international initiatives to improve women's living conditions and to promote respect for women, for their dignity and for their inalienable rights.

79. **Ms. Van der Stroom van Ewijk** (Netherlands) said that although much had been accomplished in the promotion of human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, discrimination and violence against women were taking place every day throughout the world. Mankind had coped with the problems and challenges of science and technology but seemed incapable of ensuring that women lived on an equal footing with men. Tradition, prejudice and vested interests were denying women the full enjoyment of their basic rights.

80. It was therefore regrettable that the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was lagging behind the original expectations and that only half of the States Members of the United Nations had submitted their own plans of action. The special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, which would review the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action, was therefore timely.

81. Women sought equality in all spheres — political, economic, social and cultural. Failure to include women in political matters was an affront to the very principle of democracy. As the project "Opportunity 2000" had shown, achieving economic equality was not easy. That project, initiated by her Government, was aimed at raising the level of women's participation in private businesses, organizations, universities and government departments. Setting target percentages — in the current instance, 25 per cent to 30 per cent of positions of responsibility filled by women — was not sufficient by itself. Attention had to be paid to changing structures and attitudes. Society must therefore be made aware that women should play a role in politics and the economy since, far from being the problem, they were part of the solution.

82. A number of United Nations organizations had indicated that there was a positive correlation between investing in the education and training of women, on the one hand, and increased economic growth, better health and higher levels of education for the entire nation, on the other. Since two thirds of the 900 million illiterate people in the world were women, it was urgent to remedy the problem.

83. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her part, had pointed out that there was a close link between violence against women and their restricted enjoyment of economic and social rights. There was therefore a need to ensure their financial, and hence sexual, autonomy. The Hague Ministerial Declaration on Trafficking in Women, adopted by the European Union in 1997, was extremely useful in that respect, in that it contained a number of guidelines and emphasized that violence against women in whatever form was a flagrant violation of their human rights.

84. Traditional practices affecting the health of women definitely constituted a form of violence against them, and for that reason the Netherlands had, in 1997, submitted a draft resolution on the subject which had been co-sponsored by 78 countries. A follow-up resolution would be submitted in 1998. It was to be hoped that the Commission on the Status of Women would also address the issue at its next session.

85. The sexual and reproductive rights of women were among the other issues the Commission would have to address; the reports drawn up by UNFPA had sufficiently demonstrated the worldwide systematic infringements of those rights.

86. At the international level, Governments must allow for accountability and transparency. It was necessary in that respect to adequately empower the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to give absolute priority to the adoption, in 1999 at the latest, of an optional protocol to the Convention.

87. **Mr. Kanju** (Pakistan) said that although the Fourth World Conference on Women had been a landmark in the history of women's rights, enabling society to realize that it was an economic, political and social necessity to treat both halves of humanity equally, women nevertheless remained victims of all forms of discrimination in various parts of the world.

88. Violence against women became more serious in times of armed conflict, as the atrocities committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Great Lakes region of Africa had demonstrated. In South Asia, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where people were struggling for their right to self-determination, women and girls had been persistently subjected to all kinds of violence, particularly sexual violence, by Indian security forces. That was, however, a serious breach of international humanitarian law, and international women's rights groups must draw attention to the plight of those women and call on India to bring it to an end immediately.

89. Pakistan considered that the human rights of women and the girl child were an integral part of universal human rights. Its Constitution fully guaranteed equality between men and women and provided for the full participation of women in public life (articles 25 and 34 respectively). Consequently, his Government attached high priority to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and had already submitted its national action plan as a follow-up to the Conference. It had established a Ministry of Women's Development headed by a woman Minister and supported by a provincial network of bodies responsible for ensuring coordination and implementation of the policies adopted aimed at the empowerment of women; acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; established a commission of inquiry to review discriminatory laws against women so as to harmonize its legislation with the Convention; established all-women police stations in five major cities as part of a pilot project; submitted draft legislation making gang rape an offence punishable by capital punishment; set up a unit for the purpose of ensuring respect for the rights of women victims of violence; launched, in cooperation with NGOs, a nationwide awareness campaign on violence against women; established, again in cooperation with NGOs, free legal aid centres to assist women victims of discrimination; revised the school curriculum; and reduced the population growth rate.

90. In the belief that employment played an important role in the eradication of poverty, Pakistan had launched in 1997 a second social action programme which provided for the employment of 100,000 health workers to provide basic health care to women and children, particularly in rural areas, gave preference to women candidates for job offers and encouraged women to open vocational training institutes for women and girls by providing financial support on softer terms.

91. **Ms. Wiltshire** (United Nations Development Programme) said that gender equality was both a human right and essential for poverty elimination, and could be achieved only through gender mainstreaming. Poverty was not simply inability to meet basic needs; it was also lack of access to education, health services, information, decision-making and political influence. Women comprised only 10 to 13 per cent of national elected representatives, and their incomes and literacy rates were lower than those of men. UNDP, apart from seeking to guarantee women access to those resources, also took a very close interest in the linkage between governance, economics and gender equality, and had launched a dialogue with Governments on

expanding gender-integrated national accounting methodologies, in collaboration with ILO.

92. The low status of women and the fact that, in short, they were not in control of their bodies was a key factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS and the expansion of sex trade. That trade and violence against women were not anomalies, but were intrinsic to societies governed by systems of inequality. To transform that state of affairs, systemic approaches were required, based on universally applied democratic and human rights values, combining legislative with attitudinal change, and reinforced by regulations and programmes to ensure equal access to resources. UNDP had used the opportunities presented by States emerging from crisis in Africa and Latin America to strengthen judiciaries and engender legislative processes.

93. UNDP provided active support to Governments in fulfilling their reporting requirements to the Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and was seeking to develop South-South linkages among countries, as was indicated by the case of Indonesia and Malaysia.

94. To promote effective government and administration, UNDP stressed increased access of women to decision-making and increasing the ability of rural government personnel to understand and operationalize the gender dimensions of their work. Planners and other decision makers needed to take more account of the impacts their decisions might have on individuals, and grass-roots communities, for their part, benefited from greater knowledge of their rights. UNDP supported linkages of that kind by strengthening participatory approaches to development, sponsoring dialogues and facilitating more progressive forms of policy-making.

95. The Programme provided assistance to countries in drawing up national action plans for the advancement of women, which were essential tools for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. In Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, UNDP had helped Governments review national legislation, monitor the progress made in national action plans and engage in dialogue on policies, strategies and priorities.

96. UNDP would continue, in collaboration with sister agencies, to develop capacity for gender mainstreaming and effective information-sharing, by electronic and other means, especially during the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.